



THE UNSTOPPABLE FREELANCER

How to master freelancing, build a sustainable career, and enjoy life

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To my wonderful wife, Ksenija, for supporting me in every way.

I The Foundation

Why Freelance?

*“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”
Friedrich Nietzsche*

On November 20, 2011, I woke up with a purpose for the first time in months. I had been hired for my first freelance project and I was eager to get to work. When my application was accepted the previous night, I set the alarm clock for 10 a.m. This was a great leap forward from my previous routine of waking up at noon, playing video games for eight hours, and then going out.

The project was worth \$45, and I spent the next three days figuring it out. In the end, the client marked it as ‘incomplete’ because I had no way to show my work. It didn’t matter. The paradigm had shifted.

I understood that it was possible – you could do work online, on your own schedule, and get paid. How many offers you get and how much you can earn is entirely up to you. So I kept going. I solved the problem that lost me my first client and found another project. And another. And another. And soon my friends and family started taking notice. At the time, I was the only freelancer they knew, and I had a lot of explaining to do. After all, what sort of responsible adult makes a living by doing odd jobs on the internet? The questions subsided slowly as they watched me find better and better jobs with less and less effort. About the time I spent a part of the winter on a beach in Thailand, the questions changed from “what the hell are you doing?” to “how can I do what you’re doing?”

In the following years, I watched about 20 of my friends quit their nine-to-five jobs and go freelance, one by one. And those are just the ones that talked to me before taking the leap. For some, all it took was a cup of coffee and a glance at the freelance platforms available at the time. For others, it took years of deliberation. Most of us had graduated in telecommunications or electronics, and we were only superficially familiar with software development. Yet, every single one found success

as a freelancer.

How did that happen?

I believe the answer lies in a profound truth: human beings want to be the masters of their own lives, and when they achieve that once, they will fight tooth and nail to keep it that way.

Most of my friends quit their jobs and went all in on freelancing. They were like the general who, having landed his boats in a hostile country, orders them to be burned. He is there to conquer. Having a way to retreat only diminishes his motivation and discipline. Others tried freelancing in parallel with their regular jobs. They succeeded too, albeit more slowly.

What, then, is the appeal of freelancing?

The appeal comes in several layers. The first layer, the one that you experience as soon as you begin working, is the sensation of self-reliance. There is no manager standing over you, no corporate infrastructure; it's just you, the client and their vision that you need to turn into reality. It's an intoxicating feeling that is difficult to let go of, even if you wanted to.

The second layer is the fast growth that comes with quick iterations. Every project, and every client, is an opportunity to improve. Or, perhaps, not so much an opportunity as an imperative. Your technical knowledge, your communication skills, your discipline, your work ethic, and much more, will improve in spurts with each obstacle you come across. At first, these changes don't even require conscious effort.

The third layer is the flexibility that is very easy to get accustomed to and very difficult to give up. You grow an almost biological resistance towards externally-imposed structure and scheduling. Having someone else dictate your schedule is an unnatural state of affairs and your mind knows it – that's why it is so difficult to go back to an office and a boss after experiencing the freelance lifestyle.

The fourth layer comes with the slow realization that other areas of your life are

improving because of your new approach to work. You are less stressed. You are more available. That trip you wanted to take? You can take it, just bring your laptop with you. Or don't. That activity you want to do in the morning? You can do it simply by shifting your work hours around. Your kid's recital? You will never miss one again (unless you want to, but that's beyond the scope of this book).

The fifth layer is where true professional growth happens. You start to use your free time to think about entrepreneurship and side projects. You read more. You adopt your clients' knowledge and learn about various industries. And, one day, it hits you – there's this thing you would love to build. It's going to be fun to build it, you're going to deploy it for the world to see, and, just maybe, make some money in the process. For me, this moment first happened in 2012 when I built my own fantasy sports game. I built it for the simple reason that it was the sort of fantasy sports game I wanted to play, but it didn't exist. I ran this game for a couple of years and eventually sold it. All this was made possible by freelancing.

Then, of course, there's the money. As great as freelancing is, nobody would do it if it couldn't put food on the table. For those of us in poor countries, freelancing is a way to enter the global market and escape meager local salaries. As a beginner web developer from Montenegro, I made more in my first year of freelancing than the average senior makes in local companies. The difference is tremendous. For those of you in more developed countries, it is more difficult to make freelancing pay as much as an office job – but the appeal of the five layers above is still calling to you.

Read the full book here: <https://gum.co/BeFree>